

Marines volunteer their time for VIDA program

Sgt. Maj. Victor Escobedo

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LOS ANGELES — The Marine Corps is known for telling the Marine Corps story to the local community by providing support in the form of community outreach programs. Detachment B, Marine Aircraft Group 46 Marines are continuing that tradition by providing volunteers to perform roles of instructors for close order drill and physical fitness training.

In early January, the Antelope Valley division of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department contacted the Edwards Marines requesting their support in the aforementioned roles.

MAG 46, Det. B leadership was asked to seek out volunteers interested in giving their time in this worthwhile program.

This volunteer work would involve off-duty time and weekends. The response from the Marines was overwhelming.

"I wanted to give these kids the opportunity I never had," said Cpl. Javier Gutierrez, a supply administration clerk.

"I look at them and see myself when I was growing up. I never had the chance to be mentored and I want to help them out."

Men and women of the command exceeded the expectations of the Sheriff's Department. In fact, more than 15 volunteers signed up to help with the Vital Intervention Directional Alternatives program.

The Sheriff's department had hoped for three to five volunteers. There are already volunteers on a waiting list for the next group of youth.

The VIDA program is a 16-week program specifically designed to deal with "at-risk" youth by utilizing proactive, innovative techniques for positive redirection.

Each Saturday, members of MAG 46, Det. B meet up with the youth in Lancaster to run at 6:45 a.m.



Photo by Sgt. Maj. Victor Escobedo

Edwards Marines volunteer their off-duty and weekend time for community outreach programs, mentoring at-risk Antelope Valley youth through drill and physical fitness training.

"This is a way for us to give something back to the community," said Sgt. Henry LaGrone, one of the Marine volunteers. LaGrone, who is a nondestructive inspector at Edwards, says discipline is the key to success in this program.

"This is some real-world, in-your-face time with these at-risk kids who may be on the verge of going the wrong way in life," he said.

The program is overseen by members of the law enforcement field and offers treatment, prevention and punitive components to alter negative behavior.

The youth in the program are primarily referred by the juvenile court system or parents who have petitioned the court to have youth in their custody admitted to the program.

The primary purpose of the VIDA program is to have the troubled youth bond with law enforcement officers and prevent bonding with street gang members.

Recently, students from VIDA visited Marines from MAG 46, Det. B. The youth were introduced to the working environment of some of their Marine role models. The kids were motivated, enthusiastic and very attentive to briefings they received from the Marines.

Their visit ended on a positive note.

Looking at these kids now and remembering back to the beginning of the program, the difference is amazing. The deputies and volunteers have made significant progress with these young boys and girls. It looks as though they are indeed on the right track.

